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USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE//ECJ2/POLAD//
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRISTINA 001593

DEPT FOR EUR/SCE, NSC FOR SCHULTE, USOSCE FOR ODLUM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/09/2006

TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM KDEM EAID ECON NATO SR

SUBJECT: THACI SCENESETTER: LEADER LOOKING FOR APPROVAL

¶11. (U) CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR JOHN K. MENZIES, COM, FOR
REASONS 1.5 (B&D)

SUMMARY

¶12. (C) DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF KOSOVO (PDK) PRESIDENT HASHIM THACI IS CONCERNED THAT WASHINGTON IS NEITHER MUCH INTERESTED IN NOR FRIENDLY TOWARDS HIM, AND WILL SEEK DEMONSTRATIONS OF APPROVAL, LARGEMLY TO BOLSTER HIS IMAGE IN KOSOVO, BUT ALSO BECAUSE HE WANTS THE RECOGNITION. HIS POLITICAL STRENGTH IN KOSOVO A BIT RAGGED, THACI MAY BE MORE OPEN TO ENCOURAGEMENT TO BE MORE CONSTRUCTIVE, PARTICULARLY IN REACHING OUT TO KOSOVO SERBS. IN HIS MEETINGS IN WASHINGTON, WE SHOULD ALSO PUSH HIM TO DO HIS PART BEFORE AND AFTER THE NOVEMBER ELECTIONS TO CONSOLIDATE DEMOCRACY IN KOSOVO. END SUMMARY.

POLITICIAN IN SEARCH OF...

¶13. (C) AS PDK PRESIDENT THACI LEAVES KOSOVO FOR THE U.S. SEPTEMBER 11, HE IS A POLITICIAN WHOSE RHYTHM HAS BEEN BROKEN BOTH BY HIS COMPATRIOTS' PREFERENCE FOR MOVING PAST THE WAR AND FOR POLITICAL MODERATION, AND BY AN ACUTE AWARENESS OF POLITICAL CHANGES IN WASHINGTON. NEVER ONE TO LOOK TO OTHER EUROPEAN CAPITALS, THACI NOW FEARS THAT HIS STOCK HAS FALLEN IN U.S. POLICY CIRCLES. A MAJOR REASON FOR HIS TRIP, HE HAS IMPLIED, IS TO GAUGE JUST HOW DEEP THE DISENCHANTMENT WITH HIM GOES THERE.

...APPROVAL

¶14. (C) SOMEWHAT COUNTER-INTUITIVELY PERHAPS, IT IS THACI WHO HAS MOST RELIED ON A PRESUMED "ALLIANCE" WITH THE U.S. TO BOLSTER HIS POLITICAL FORTUNES. HIS POLITICAL FORTUNES IN KOSOVO HAVE SAGGED. DEMOCRATIC LEAGUE OF KOSOVO (LDK) PRESIDENT RUGOVA HAS SOME 12 YEARS OF POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT AND LEADERSHIP IN KOSOVO, AS WELL AS STILL VERY STRONG POPULAR SENTIMENT IN HIS FAVOR. THACI WILL ALWAYS FALL SHORT OF RUGOVA'S STATURE AS A FATHER FIGURE FOR THE K-ALBANIANS. AT A PRISTINA CULTURAL EVENT SEPTEMBER 8, RUGOVA APPEARED RELAXED AND CONNECTED WELL WITH THE AUDIENCE. IN CONTRAST, THACI FELL FLAT IN HIS SPEECH.

¶5. (C) ALLIANCE FOR THE FUTURE OF KOSOVO (AAK) PRESIDENT RAMUSH HARADINAJ CAN POINT TO HIS OWN WAR RECORD WHEN HE NEEDS TO, BUT HAS NOT SAT ON HIS LAURELS, INSTEAD ENERGETICALLY PURSUING A RANGE OF POLITICAL ALLIANCES AND BROADENING THE APPEAL OF HIS COALITION. SPECULATION IS RIFE THAT THE AAK WILL SURPASS THE PDK ON NOVEMBER 17 AND BECOME KOSOVO'S SECOND POLITICAL FORCE AND REAL OPPOSITION. AS THE BRITISH COM PUT IT RECENTLY, THACI COULD BECOME "YESTERDAY'S MAN" IN KOSOVO.

¶6. (C) BOTH RUGOVA AND HARADINAJ ARE EAGER TO COOPERATE AND MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE U.S., OF COURSE, BUT NEITHER NEEDS US IN THE WAY THACI, WHO REMAINS PERSONALLY VESTED IN HAVING "LIBERATED" KOSOVO, SEEMS TO DO. HE WILL BE ANXIOUS, AS THE CAMPAIGN SEASON STARTS IN KOSOVO, TO PORTRAY HIMSELF AS PLUGGED INTO THE USG IN WASHINGTON AND UN IN NEW YORK. HE WILL SEEK A PUBLIC POLITICAL EMBRACE FROM U.S. OFFICIALS.

...SUPPORT

¶7. (C) THACI AND OTHER PDK LEADERS HAVE NOT DONE MUCH EITHER TO REDEFINE THEMSELVES IDEOLOGICALLY OR TO RE-ENERGIZE THE PARTY ORGANIZATION FOLLOWING THEIR DISAPPOINTING, BUT NOT WHOLLY UNEXPECTED, SHOWING LAST OCTOBER. RUMORS OF INFIGHTING HAVE INCREASED DURING THE YEAR (ALTHOUGH THACI WAS ABLE IN DECEMBER AND JANUARY TO DISAPPEAR TO THE U.S. FOR 6 WEEKS WITHOUT APPARENT CONCERN OVER A COUP D'ETAT). MORE THAN ONCE, THE PRESS STATEMENTS AND PUBLIC POSITIONS OF PDK OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN AT VARIANCE, HIGHLIGHTING SHAKY CENTRAL CONTROL. MOREOVER, THE PDK HAS SEVERAL WELL-KNOWN AND MEDIA SAVVY HIGH OFFICERS, MORE THAN ONE OF WHOM MAY SEEK AN EVEN HIGHER PROFILE IN THE PARTY. ANOTHER DISAPPOINTING SHOWING IN THE NOVEMBER ELECTIONS COULD SHARPEN THE INTERNAL CHALLENGE TO THACI.

...ENCOURAGEMENT TO DO RIGHT

¶8. (C) DESPITE HIS POLITICAL WOES, HOWEVER, THACI IS SHOWING SOME OPENNESS TO POSITIVE STEPS ON THE KOSOVO SCENE. FOR EXAMPLE, IN A RECENT DISCUSSION WITH THE COM, HE AGREED TO MEET WITH THE K-SERB LEADER MOMCILLO TRAJKOVIC, PROVIDED USOP ASSISTED IN FACILITATING AND PROVIDING A VENUE. THE KOSOVAR PRESS IS REPORTING ON THE INVITATION OF SERBIAN PM DJINDJIC FOR THACI TO VISIT BELGRADE. EARLIER THIS SUMMER, WHEN DJINDJIC SUGGESTED ORALLY THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO MET WITH BOTH THACI AND KOSOVO PROTECTION CORPS (KPC) COMMANDER AGIM CEKU, THACI EXPRESSED SOME WILLINGNESS TO CONSIDER A MEETING ON NEUTRAL GROUND. WE DO NOT KNOW IF HE WILL GO TO BELGRADE (HE MAY SUSPECT A POLITICAL OR JUDICIAL TRAP), BUT HE HAS ACKNOWLEDGED RECEIVING THE SERBIAN PM'S LATEST, AND MORE OFFICIAL, INVITATION.

¶9. (C) INTERESTINGLY, THOSE WHO ATTEND MEETINGS OF THE INTERIM ADVISORY COUNCIL (IAC) KNOW THAT IN PRIVATE, THACI IS COMFORTABLE AND GETS ALONG WELL WITH SERB OBSERVER RADA TRAJKOVIC, JOKING WITH HER EVEN IN SERBIAN. PRECISELY BECAUSE OF HIS KLA LEADERSHIP DURING THE WAR, THACI IS POLITICALLY SAFER IN REACHING OUT TO KOSOVO SERBS THAN IS RUGOVA. THE LATTER WAS MORE THAN ONCE PORTRAYED AS "SOFT ON SERBIA", AND FINDS THIS HIS MOST SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL VULNERABILITY. THACI CANNOT BE ACCUSED OF COMPLICITY. WE BELIEVE THAT HE RECOGNIZES THIS AND MAY SEEK TO USE DEALINGS WITH THE SERBS TO RAISE HIS PROFILE -- AND GAIN OUR APPROVAL. WE SHOULD ENCOURAGE HIM TO UNDERTAKE CONSTRUCTIVE MOVES IN THIS DIRECTION, SINCE THIS IS AN AREA IN WHICH HE AND HIS FOLLOWERS CAN DO A LOT TO IMPROVE THE CLIMATE FOR RECONCILIATION AND RETURNS.

¶10. (C) IN THE REGIONAL CONTEXT, AS EVENTS IN THE FYROM DEGENERATED DURING THE SPRING, THACI TOOK THE MOST CONSTRUCTIVE PUBLIC LINE FOR SOME TIME (WHATEVER HE OR HIS COHORTS MAY HAVE DONE LESS PUBLICLY), OFFERING POLITICAL SUPPORT TO HIS OLD MENTOR ARBEN XHAFFERI, PRESIDENT OF THE ALBANIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PDSH) IN FYROM AND MOST PROMINENT

OF THE ALBANIANS IN PARTICIPATING IN GOVERNMENT THERE. THACI MAINTAINED THIS SUPPORT DESPITE CRITICISM FROM WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY AS TO HIS LOYALTY TO THE ALBANIAN CAUSE.

...A FUTURE

¶11. (C) THACI TOLD THE COM RECENTLY THAT VIOLENCE HAS TAPERED OFF IN KOSOVO. THERE ARE STILL OCCASIONAL REPORTS OF ATTACKS OR INSTANCES OF INTIMIDATION AGAINST LDK ACTIVISTS IN PARTICULAR, HOWEVER, AND THACI KNOWS WELL THAT PDK IS ALWAYS THE FIRST SUSPECT. IN OUR PRIVATE DISCUSSIONS, THACI IS ALREADY WARNING OF LDK POLITICAL DOMINANCE, WHICH HE FEARS WILL BECOME "ONE-PARTY RULE." USG OFFICIALS MAY WISH TO ENCOURAGE HIM TO ENCOURAGE CONTINUED REDUCTION OF VIOLENCE, TO BEHAVE CONSTRUCTIVELY DURING THE CAMPAIGN, AND TO DO HIS PART, NO MATTER WHAT THE ELECTORAL OUTCOME, TO CONSOLIDATE DEMOCRACY IN KOSOVO.

¶12. (U) BELGRADE MINIMIZE CONSIDERED.

MENZIES